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FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2495
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 5740
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001455

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/08/2017

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SUBJECT: STAFFDEL ASHWORTH HEARS TURKISH VIEWS ON IRAQ, NATO

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: Turkey's Special Representative for Iraq Ahmet Oguz Celikkol told Staffdel Ashworth May 29 that reluctance from Baghdad is preventing Turkey from doing more for Iraq, including assistance with restructuring its Defense and Interior Ministries. The GOT fears most the breakup of Iraq and the resulting devastating effect on regional security. Senior Iraqi leaders appear sympathetic to Turkish concerns about the PKK, but have encouraged the GOT to communicate directly with KRG President Barzani, which Turkey is willing to do but has found practically impossible given Barzani's inflammatory rhetoric. In a separate meeting, MFA NATO Head of Department Ahmet Ihsan Kiziltan told the Staffdel that Turkey's participation in NATO remains vibrant and that GOT military contributions to alliance efforts include Turkey's taking command of KFOR Multinational Task Force South in Kosovo on May 29. End summary

Contributions to Iraq

12. (C) Turkey has been increasingly concerned with sectarian divisions in Iraq and Shia-Sunni violence, and has sought to find ways to help stabilize the country, Celikkol told the staffdel, including broadening the political discussion. Turkey had brought Sunni leaders to the late 2005 Istanbul conference in an effort at political reconciliation. The GOT is concerned about the capacity of some Iraqi ministries, and is ready to provide assistance to restructure the Defense and Interior Ministries, but Baghdad's reluctance has prevented a higher level of Turkish aid to Iraq.

13. (C) Ambassador Celikkol stressed that Turkey's economic contributions were important to Iraq, noting the large number of Turkish firms that operate in northern Iraq; two-way trade is valued at nearly \$10 billion annually. A high percentage of northern Iraq's energy needs and MNFI fuel requirements are met by imports from Turkey through the Habur Gate land border crossing.

Iraqi Unity Essential

14. (C) The political unity of Iraq is crucial to the security of the entire region, Celikkol emphasized. Turkey's nightmare is a full-fledged civil war in the aftermath of which Iraq is divided in three mini-states: a Shia state

controlled by Iran in the south which would have the bulk of the oil resources; a Sunni state which would be a breeding ground for al-Qaeda and threaten Turkey, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states; and a land-locked, "unwanted, and out-of-control" Kurdish state in the north. These mini-states would have a devastating effect on the security and power balance in the region.

15. (C) Celikkol told the staffdel that the full extent of Iranian influence in Iraq was not known, but that since most Shia groups in Iraq had their origins in Iran and had suffered for so long from persecution under Saddam, there were clearly very strong connections to Iran. Turkey is reaching out to Iraqi Shias, he added. For this reason, Turkey is considering opening a new consulate in Basra.

We Will Talk with Barzani

16. (C) Noting the many discussions he had in Baghdad May 27-28, Celikkol said that Prime Minister al-Maliki recognizes that the PKK is a terrorist organization. Other senior Iraqi leaders expressed sympathy for Turkey's frustrations with PKK safehavens in northern Iraq, but advised Turkey to discuss the problem with Barzani. Celikkol told the staffdel that Turkey wants to talk to Barzani and hopes to do so, but that every time a meeting has been in the offing, Barzani had made inflammatory public remarks which had made it impossible for senior Turkish officials to meet with him. It is important that some PKK leaders be arrested and a few camps be closed, he stressed.

Turkish Contributions to NATO

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17. (C) In a separate meeting with the MFA NATO Department, Department Head Ahmet Ihsan Kiziltan told the Staffdel that Turkey had weathered many political storms in NATO, but that Turkey's participation the alliance remained vibrant. It was a solid, long-term relationship. Since national security is paramount, Turkey's membership in NATO is more important than its accession to the EU. Turkey supports NATO enlargement, both geographically and functionally, and has contributed to NATO military and assistance missions to Bosnia, Kosovo, Darfur, and Afghanistan. Kiziltan noted that Turkey took over the command of NATO's KFOR Multinational Task Force South in Kosovo on May 29.

18. (U) Ms. Ashworth has cleared this cable.

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